

Using your



**Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement**

**Case studies and examples of using VOiCE**  
- electronic software to support effective community engagement

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## Introduction

VOiCE is a database planning and recording tool that assists individuals, organisations and partnerships to design and deliver effective community engagement. It was commissioned and published by Scottish Government in 2008. From 2008-2010 the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), which designed the tool, conducted a dissemination and demonstration programme on behalf of Scottish Government. These case studies and shorter 'snapshot' descriptions of the application of VOiCE arise from that programme.

Six sites were identified as demonstration sites. Here members of the SCDC VOiCE team supported and monitored the use of the tool. The sites were in; City of Edinburgh Council, Glasgow City Council (2), Perth and Kinross Council, South Lanarkshire Council and the Equally Well Health Initiative in Dundee. Most of the case studies and snapshots come from work in these sites, though in addition there are a few that arise from the wider dissemination of VOiCE.

The case studies illustrate the diversity of potential applications of VOiCE. It has been used to:

- support engagement with communities across the lifespan.
- focus on issues from the very local to the city wide and beyond.
- analyse, plan, conduct and evaluate engagement.
- address a large range of issues including community safety, poverty, health, planning, environmental development, policing, employability, design.
- underpin engagement by many different professions and directly by communities themselves.

In addition to these illustrations of VOiCE in practice there are several other publications to introduce and support the use of the tool. They are:

- An introductory booklet - 'Finding your VOiCE'.
- A review of benefits and issues in using VOiCE - 'VOiCEs of Experience'.
- A detailed reference manual for use with the tool.
- A booklet setting out the key questions and handy hints that are contained in the VOiCE tool.
- A pull out leaflet setting the VOiCE site map alongside the National Standards for Community Engagement.

These publications are now available for download from the VOiCE website [www.voicescotland.org.uk](http://www.voicescotland.org.uk). Information about VOiCE is also available at the SCDC website [www.scdc.org.uk](http://www.scdc.org.uk). The VOiCE software can be downloaded from both of these sites and will be available as an online application from September 2010.

# Supporting a Multi Agency Approach to Engaging Older People

## Overview

Perth and Kinross Council, NHS Tayside and the Voluntary sector worked in partnership to organise an event to celebrate National Older People's Day. The event called 'Age Matters' was held on 1 October 2009 and was specifically designed as an opportunity to advise older people of the services and information available to them in Perth and Kinross and to promote healthy living. VOiCE was used to support a partnership approach to planning the day and supporting better community engagement. This case study will focus on how VOiCE supported community engagement in the context of a multi agency partnership and will highlight the learning and benefits which were realised as a result.

## Context

The 'Older People's Consultation and Engagement Group' made up of statutory and voluntary sector colleagues in Perth and Kinross planned to hold an event which would attract as many people from the older age group as possible from around Perth and Kinross. The event was designed to inform participants about the services which are available to older people in the area and to give them an opportunity to meet the service providers from a variety of sectors. The Group recognised that this was their first multi agency thematic event of this size so a sub group was formed to take the work forward. The Sub Group included staff and managers from NHS Tayside and the Council's Housing and Community Care Department. Each partner brought specific skills and experience to the table, the NHS had some experience at consultation and the Council brought expertise in developing large events. The sub group decided that since Perth and Kinross was a Development Site for the National VOiCE Programme they could benefit from using the tool for this large scale partnership event. NHS and Council colleagues agreed that VOiCE was the right tool to plan, record and evaluate the engagement process.

Following some initial training for some members of the Sub Group by Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) the Group used VOiCE on their own and developed their own processes for working together with the tool. Not all individuals on the sub group had taken up the training so there were different levels of understanding in terms of the structure and terminology of the tool. The sub group met around the table and went through the VOiCE template and discussed and agreed how to plan the event. Both NHS Tayside and the Council have access to VOiCE software, however, they are on different networks and could not update the same record. It was agreed at that point that a partner from the Council would take responsibility for updating the content of VOiCE for this exercise.

In planning the event the engagement partners welcomed the fact that VOiCE helped structure their discussions and thinking, for example it supported them to develop joint outcomes and develop realistic outcome indicators. These joint engagement outcomes were used to shape the evaluation of the event.

## Using VOiCE

The Sub Group commented that VOiCE was extremely positive in this engagement process, the tool supported them to think through the main elements of the event and to highlight shared resources and contact lists which is important for joint working. As the partnership was evolving the tool supported and structured discussions and helped them to develop a clear vision based on a common language. Partners commented that in practice the tool supported them by keeping a detailed record which gave a “.....comprehensive overview highlighting responsibilities, what had been carried out and what had slipped off the agenda.”

While the Sub Group advised that it would have been useful to have the tool on a shared server or web based platform so that all partners could view the record they actually found it useful to have one moderator taking responsibility for the joint record. A partner, based within the Council, was responsible for maintaining the record and bringing it along to meetings to assess and update progress.

Another key learning point was that VOiCE was useful in maintaining continuity when partners could not attend meetings but were instead able to contribute to the VOiCE record via email. It was agreed that this was a useful mechanism to keep each of the managers up-to-date with developments and ensured their continued contribution to the development process even though they weren't always able to attend meetings. The group commented that this was an efficient way of working as it's not always feasible to get everyone around the table for discussion. This approach ensured that the engagement programme remained on track and that key people could still contribute and take ownership of the process.

The event attracted 237 residents from around Perthshire and over 40 service providers and agencies were available on the day to provide information to participants. The partners contacted colleagues in other Council and NHS services and voluntary agencies as well as the Police and Fire service to provide an information stall at the event.

Following the 'Age Matters' day members of the sub group met up to evaluate the event using the VOiCE Software. The review was supported with the evaluation forms from the service providers and delegates taken on the day. Three NHS and two Council colleagues worked through the review section of the tool. The group reported that they spent a long time on the review section because it was the first time that they had met up since the event itself and this led to numerous side discussions about different aspects of the event. Also, the group were working through VOiCE for the first time so spent time reacquainting themselves with the Standards for Community Engagement and the scoring criteria within the tool and reading many of the advice notes. The Group took extra care in wording their responses because they wanted to use the VOiCE record for wider distribution within the NHS and Council Departments. One member of the group commented that they felt that *“...the next time round the evaluation section of VOiCE will be quicker because it won't be such a new process for us.”*

It is important to note that the partners participating in the review had different ideas about the strengths and weaknesses of the engagement process. The tool gave them the format in terms of the Standards and Outcomes to discuss each of these aspects in some detail and reach a shared view of the engagement process.

As a result of working through the Review section of VOiCE the group identified key priorities for future events, these include:

- the importance of having an older person from a hard to reach area involved in the planning stage to help encourage participation
- the need for clear roles and responsibilities in future multi agency working
- the need to research more suitable venues for National Older People's Day in 2010.



# Community Engagement and Health Inequalities

## Overview

The key purposes of the Equally Well Development Site were to ensure that future actions reflected local needs and aspirations and also to promote community ownership and participation in the test site development. The focus for this case study is therefore an analysis of the application of community engagement approaches in tackling health inequalities, and how this has impacted on the community and on the partners involved in the Equally Well process both at a local and national level.

## Context

'Equally Well' is the report of the Scottish Government's Health Inequalities Task Force and was produced in 2008. A key part of implementing the recommendations of Equally Well was the setting up of local test sites, each focusing on a different Equally Well priority. The theme of the Dundee test site is improving community mental wellbeing. Each test site is a partnership involving local public services, aimed at addressing the determinants of inequalities in the health and wellbeing of people.

Initial discussions with Equally Well stakeholders at a national level indicated a high level of interest in VOiCE and it was agreed that Dundee should be the focus for the VOiCE development site. Use of VOiCE focused on one discrete piece of community engagement – the community conference on mental wellbeing in the Stobswell area of Dundee.

## Stobswell Community Mental Wellbeing Conference

### Description

The piece of engagement chosen for the VOiCE development site was the organisation, planning, implementation and evaluation of a community conference focusing on mental wellbeing in the Stobswell area of Dundee. The Equally Well lead officer (who is also an experienced community worker) worked with a planning group of local workers, and involved local residents and forums in discussions about the engagement process. The engagement took place over an 8 month period during 2009 and followed a complete Analyse, Plan, Do and Review cycle. Generally it was felt to have achieved the outcomes indicated in the plan, that of raising awareness and ownership of the test site for local people and service providers, and identifying assets, influences and indicators for mental wellbeing. In addition VOiCE proved extremely useful in providing a framework for the process of engagement as well as highlighting key strength areas and areas for improvement.

### Process Analysis

Some members of the working group for the Stobswell work had relatively low starting levels of understanding about mental wellbeing. Most were relatively experienced in some forms of community engagement, particularly through participation in the local community planning process. This was enhanced by a huge commitment to the area and a detailed knowledge and understanding of the issues faced by local residents. The Lead Officer made a conscious decision not to explicitly focus too much on the use of the VOiCE database at the analysis and planning stage. However, the VOiCE process was still followed through use of the trigger questions throughout the whole process of engagement. This demonstrates that the questions VOiCE raises can be used without the participants needing to be involved in directly working on the database.

As is usual with pieces of engagement that are focused round events, the actual practicalities and actions took over at the implementation stage. During this time it fell to the Lead Officer to continue to keep up with the recording in order to ensure that planned actions were being undertaken and any remedial actions agreed and implemented. Her initial fears about data input proved to be unfounded as this wasn't as time consuming as first thought. Again this demonstrates that, as long as the structure of VOiCE is used in framing and guiding the engagement process, participants do not necessarily need to be involved in directly using the tool.

It was only really after the event, at the review stage, that there was more explicit reference to the use of VOiCE as being the framework that underpinned the engagement process. At the review stage some participants were initially quite reluctant and reserved about self-evaluating and scoring. This may have been to do with the lack of knowledge/ awareness of VOiCE and is something which needs some attention if participants are not directly involved in using the database throughout the full community engagement process. However, it may also have been connected to some participants not having experience of the kind of self-evaluation processes that are used in VOiCE. Another factor was that the review session was incorporated into a regular planning group meeting which didn't give enough time for proper reflection and didn't make it a distinctive enough element of the process. It would have been really useful to set the review date right at the start as this would have ensured the discipline to run the session when planned and to treat it as a key part of the process.

## Review, Analysis and Learning

On reflecting on the use of VOiCE in Stobswell the Equally Well Lead Officer highlighted the following key learning points:

- In an effort to try and keep the use of VOiCE contained and manageable it was decided to use it solely to analyse, plan, implement and review the Community Conference. However, undertaking any piece of community engagement naturally starts to impact on other work, and influences thinking about practice. In retrospect it would have been useful not to limit VOiCE to just the Stobswell Conference but to use it for a range of engagement activity involved in the test site work. Examples of these activities include questionnaires, focus group sessions and presentations/ inputs to a variety of local meetings and events.
- The wider application of VOiCE as a community engagement learning tool is still to be achieved. Through the test site there has been some limited use of VOiCE but wider dissemination of the learning is needed which can then influence others in their community engagement practice.
- In dealing with workers/agencies regarding their impact on mental wellbeing, VOiCE helps to make it real and can/should be used to help this process along. It asks the questions that stimulate thinking amongst service providers and helps make the community engagement process tangible.
- Being based on the Standards it helps to focus a range of workers with differing levels of knowledge and experience and helps to ensure consistency of approach. The impacts on mental wellbeing are so wide that VOiCE can help to give a focus.

## Overall Outcomes

Mental wellbeing is one of the main causes and consequences of health inequalities. In relation to health improvement the process of dealing with symptoms lies mainly with the medical profession whilst the process of dealing with the health determinants often lies elsewhere (this is even more significant within the field of mental wellbeing). In dealing with health determinants the process of engaging people is a health improving activity in itself (gaining control, self-respect, self-esteem, confidence, skills, etc.).

The use of VOiCE in the Equally Well Test Site in Dundee has been informative and interesting and highlights the potential for a whole range of further uses in relation to supporting community engagement in tackling health inequalities. As a direct result of the Development Site work some shared learning with other Equally Well Test Sites has already taken place which has led to interest in use of VOiCE in other areas.



# Reaping the legacy of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games - Health Impact Assessment Community Engagement

## Overview

Glasgow City is hosting the 2014 Commonwealth Games. As the Games will affect all residents of the city, Glasgow City Council wanted to ensure that local people feel they have ownership of the proposed plans and activities for the 2014 Games thus ensuring a sustainable legacy. To assess residents' perceptions of how they would be affected by the Games, the City Council's Corporate Services Department carried out a Health Impact Assessment (HIA). They used VOiCE as a tool to guide and promote more effective engagement as well as to record the findings from the community engagement aspect of the HIA.

## The Context

Hosting the Commonwealth Games is a huge and complex undertaking. The success of the Games and the legacy thereafter, to a considerable extent depend on buy-in from the people of Glasgow. Residents' participation and involvement can lead to a sense of ownership, pride and renewed confidence in the city. This is in addition to the economic and physical benefits resulting from infrastructure that remains from the Games. Glasgow City officials believed that communities know best what will affect them and therefore sought their views. Such stakeholder involvement is a key component of the HIA process.

It was agreed that engaging more effectively with the residents of Glasgow by implementing the National Standards for Community Engagement during the HIA exercise would bring in valuable information, involve the residents more in the decisions being made as well as provide the opportunity to disseminate accurate information about the plans for the Games as the preparations progressed. VOiCE was used to guide and record the community engagement aspect of the HIA

This exercise which involved residents from across Glasgow led to some recommendations being made in line with residents' views regarding how they wished to see the Games planned and implemented. In addition lessons were learnt and recommendations made about the value of community engagement and how best to do this in similarly complex circumstances.

Independent specialist community development support was bought in from SCDC to provide training and support on the National Standards for Community Engagement and VOiCE; and from the Glasgow East Regeneration Agency Community Health Initiative to support the development of the interactive discussion workshops using Participatory Appraisal Techniques.

## The use of VOiCE

VOiCE was used in two ways, guided by the strong desire by officers to ensure that the National Standards for Community Engagement were observed and practised. It was used in the following ways:

- As a tool to improve practice in community engagement. Using the questions and prompts in VOiCE helped to guide the “analyse” and “plan” stages of the community engagement as the project progressed. Officers were able to decide the nature of information and sessions they should have with residents in advance of and during meetings with the public using guidance from VOiCE. In addition VOiCE was used to review of the whole community engagement exercise.
- As a recording tool. Recording on the VOiCE database was carried out retrospectively, pulling together information gathered from various discussions and events.

## Analyse and Plan

### Level of engagement:

For most residents, the HIA incorporating the community engagement exercise involved informing residents about what was going to take place when the Games came to Glasgow and the plans to date. It was accepted as a given that many decisions had already been made without community involvement and were therefore no longer open to influence (e.g. that the Games will be held in Glasgow, the 17 sports to be included in the competition, the location of the venues and village). However, for some plans, the public could still be consulted where there was a choice between a number of restricted options (e.g. the exact nature of new build facilities). For some areas though, where there were limited or no plans at the time, the residents were being engaged in formulating and considerably influencing decisions. This is mainly around the development of the legacy framework - a strategy document representing the Council’s plans on legacy, and provides details of the strategic outcomes to be achieved in the time period up to 2019 (i.e. planning for the 5 years up to games, and 5 years after). It is intended that the community continues to influence the legacy plans throughout, as now detailed in the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games Community Engagement Strategy document (draft).

### Reasons for engaging:

It was accepted that the Commonwealth Games has a potential impact on a wide range of social determinants of health. Glasgow City Council wanted to find out:

- How much do people already feel engaged in the Commonwealth Games?
- What are the potential health impacts (positive and negative) of the Commonwealth Games?
- Which groups/communities will be affected differently? Will some groups be disadvantaged?
- What actions can/should be taken to maximise the positive and to minimise the negative impacts?
- What can local communities contribute?

The outcomes for the community engagement exercise were arrived at following discussion workshops with stakeholders. There were outcomes for agencies, communities and individuals. These ranged from raising awareness of delivery plans and potential health impacts of the Commonwealth Games; an increased awareness and use of the National Standards for Community Engagement and VOiCE database to promote good practice in community engagement; partnership working on community engagement enabling a broad range of people to take part in the process and individuals achieving an increased sense of ‘connectedness’ to the 2014 Commonwealth Games. A key outcome was to ensure that learning from the community engagement informed the Community Engagement Plan for the 2014 Commonwealth Games and other future mega-sporting events.

## Do

Residents’ views were gathered using a range of methods starting with information giving, online questionnaires through to focus groups and the participatory appraisal methodology used in workshops. Examples of these are:

- A scoping event to engage with key 2014 decision makers on priorities, concerns and timelines and to consider all the potential health impacts of the Commonwealth Games, the size of the impact, the groups most likely to be affected and the potential to influence the decisions that affect this, in order to prioritise issues for further assessment.
- Glasgow Household Survey -The survey is carried out every six months. For the autumn 2008 survey, there was a boosted sample of an additional 200 people in East and North East Glasgow. Specific questions were asked on thoughts and concerns about the Games.
- Web and paper questionnaire - questions specific to the HIA were developed, based on the themes emerging from the scoping event. These questions were designed to help identify the most important issues within a number of categories. There were open questions to ask what respondents felt the biggest impact would be on them personally and also what one action the organisers should take to make sure there are lasting benefits for the people of Glasgow.
- Interactive discussion workshops designed to provide an opportunity for people to contribute to the community engagement process in a different and more participatory way using Participatory Appraisal and data collection methodology. Following these, local residents/workers facilitated discussions with existing groups in their own communities with various degrees of success in follow through.
- Feedback events designed to provide an opportunity to present the combined findings and proposed recommendations of the process to people who had participated for verification, ahead of finalising the report.
- Summary Report Publication - Once the HIA Final Report was published and approved, a summary version was produced for the public and distributed widely.

## Community engagement review

VOiCE was used to review the HIA community engagement. Review sessions were carried out by SCDC with some of the stakeholders who had been involved in the process. The review sessions included face-to-face discussion with staff involved in using Participatory Appraisal methods; discussion with the HIA steering group; telephone and face-to-face interviews with community members and agency staff involved in either delivering workshops or organising them and distributing information; and a reflection session with the “keeper of VOiCE” from Glasgow City Council (the team member responsible for inputting information into the VOiCE database) to get feedback and insight on experiences of using the tool.

The review sessions noted key successes and areas for improvement. The HIA steering group review identified the following key lessons for improving community engagement practice within the Council:

- Strategic buy-in must be there from the start and sustained – senior officers are gatekeepers for community engagement and need to be involved sooner in directing the process.
- On reflection, the total lack of community involvement in the Commonwealth Games Bid impacted on the starting point of the HIA community engagement process.
- Meaningful engagement takes time and needs to be adequately resourced.

In addition, as a result of using VOiCE to improve practice in HIA community engagement, some unanticipated outcomes were realised. These include:

- Senior staff grew to understand and appreciate the value of good community engagement for HIA
- A clear shift was achieved in how people moved from being consulted to more involvement and collaboration
- Subsequent City-wide projects such as the Health Commission work coming after the HIA engagement process revealed the community’s perceptions of genuinely being engaged rather than just informed suggesting that levels and effectiveness of community engagement are gradually improving.

Reflection on the use of VOiCE by the “keeper of VOiCE” indicated that VOiCE:

- Supports purposeful dialogue with communities. It effectively embeds and is very helpful for working towards achieving the National Standards for Community Engagement.
- VOiCE is very effective for planning the community engagement process and for recording the project. Careful consideration should be made about having the database on site in the community so as not to stifle debate and discussion at events.
- Supports a collaborative approach to community engagement. It helps with identification of stakeholders/ partners to meet the Involvement Standard, though it is necessary to take care to think more about how to engage them in the process at “Analyse and Plan” stages.
- Provides structure for involving stakeholders in analysing and planning the engagement; sets clear outcomes and criteria for assessing engagement performance against the National Standards.

A lesson in improving efficiency in the application of VOiCE arising from the HIA community engagement is that, in order to ensure the efficient use of VOiCE, it is a good idea to understand the VOiCE tool well before embarking on the engagement and to record information as the engagement progresses, rather than pasting information into VOiCE from other documents at a later date.

From the sustained experience of using VOiCE in the Commonwealth Games HIA the steering group concluded that:

- VOiCE enabled capturing and sharing of learning.
- The process of using VOiCE helped to improve the quality of community engagement more than the database itself.
- VOiCE can be used to improve the design and delivery of future services within the council (though integrating VOiCE with an existing consultation data-base is an outstanding issue to be addressed)
- The ability to produce reports is a big selling point for the database.

The “keeper of VOiCE” in the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games concluded that VOiCE “is completely useful in supporting the engagement process, e.g. partnership working and expectations; clear and agreed standards; is good for engagements that have multiple methods, flexible and constantly changing and provides centralised recording and presents a real challenge to mere consultation”.



# Evaluating Engagement in a Neighbourhood Partnership

## Overview

This case study highlights the review process undertaken by Liberton/Gilmerton Neighbourhood Partners (NP) who used VOiCE to evaluate the effectiveness of their engagement initiative. The NP sought to consult with the whole community as to whether the priorities identified in the local community plan were correct and reflected the needs and aspirations of the wider community. The record was filled in retrospectively on the VOiCE tool since the engagement had already taken place.

## Context

Edinburgh has 12 Neighbourhood Partnerships. Each one involves local Councillors and representatives from the Police, Health the Voluntary Sector and the local community, represented by Community Councils. Each NP has a range of action groups that bring these partners together to look at and work on priorities for the area. Much of the work of NPs is coordinated through a local community plan, which explains what needs to be done, and how it will be done.

The engagement by Liberton/Gilmerton Neighbourhood Partners was pitched at the consult level, that is supporting the community to take decisions within restricted options. This level was thought appropriate because the priorities were identified by workers and agencies in the area. The community were asked to comment on whether they were the right priorities and to rank these priorities in order of importance to them. The engagement initiative was taken forward by various partners in the NP who sought to consult as many local people as possible. The engagement process was designed to ensure that people felt that they had a voice and felt involved in the development of the local plans.

In order that local people could engage on their own terms the process was designed to have a variety of methods which included discussions at a Voluntary Sector Conference and Neighbourhood Forums. Information was also made available in local libraries, community newspapers and a variety of community events. Similarly, an innovative photography project was used to get young peoples opinions and to involve them in the engagement process itself. The NP also had over 400 responses to their community questionnaire.

As a result of the consultation one particular priority 'Young People and Alcohol' was drop because feed back from the various consultation methods suggested that the community did not feel this was a pressing priority. The NP proposed from the outset that it would only take forward the most pressing priorities identified by the community in the engagement process.

## Using VOiCE to Review the Engagement

The introduction of VOiCE to the NP came after the engagement had been planned and undertaken by the Partners. As a development site SCDC raised awareness of the tool amongst partners and supported some implementation in the area. Partners recognised that VOiCE would be a useful tool to retrospectively look at the engagement process and review the it against the National Standards for Community Engagement. The Analyse and Plan section within the tool were completed retrospectively on the day of the Review with key partners sitting round the table discussing the questions. The key partners include; Services to Communities, Community Learning and Development, Community Representative, Voluntary Sector and Health. The VOiCE tool was projected on to a white board so that all present could discuss the questions and collectively agree on the responses.



“It was useful to have partners around the table to formulate a collective view in an informal setting. The discussion focused on roles and function, what didn’t happen and what could have been better.” Neighbourhood Partnership Manager.

Partners discussed their initial thoughts when undertaking the work to fill in the Analyse and Plan sections of VOiCE. Each individual had their own perceptions of what worked and what didn’t work in the engagement process. This led to constructive discussions about the score for each of the Standards and the Engagement Outcomes.

As a result of these discussions, in the Review section partners concluded that the engagement exercise was very good but was weak when it came to involving the BME community. Participants agreed that they had not put in place specific methods to engage this group and that they needed to be aware of this for any future engagement activity.

## The Value of VOiCE

The group reported that they enjoyed using VOiCE for a number of reasons. It was seen as a positive process in which each partner had an equal say in the discussion which was subsequently recorded on the VOiCE tool. Community Representatives and community and voluntary sector colleagues felt that their voice was reflected in the record of the discussion. There was open debate which encouraged and supported partners to talk about their own perceptions of the engagement process. It was clear that community and voluntary sector colleagues had a different perception of the success of the engagement process from their statutory sector colleagues. In particular there were different views about how effective the group were at feeding back the results of the consultation, the community and voluntary sector colleagues felt that feedback could have been quicker and more thorough.

Participants found the scoring against the Standards a rewarding and informative process. By reviewing the Standards against a live project many felt it was a way to revisit the Standards and accompanying indicators in some detail and increase their knowledge of the application of the Standards in practice. VOiCE helped highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the engagement process and allowed for honest discussion and debate about what worked well and what could have been better. For many colleagues round the table this was the first time that they had collectively reviewed their work in terms of community engagement, they noted:

‘It [review of engagement] simply hadn’t happened in the past. You move on to another piece of work without taking time to reflect and look back.’

They reported that this was an opportunity for meaningful reflection and a way to identify and record the lessons that they have learned and identify key actions for the future.

Overall the participants felt good about the whole VOiCE review process, they advised that it was a very positive discussion and they particularly liked the fact that it was a self evaluation, conducted internally which didn’t involve external consultants. They described VOiCE review as a ‘breath of fresh air’ in comparison to the traditional approach of appointing consultants to evaluate initiatives as all the knowledge and experience was in the room. VOiCE helped harness and structure the discussion to produce an effective evaluation.

The Neighbourhood partnership manager has been promoting VOiCE to the wider Partnership including most recently the local Police. He has also been working directly with the community itself to plan future engagements using the VOiCE tool.

# Communities influencing anti-poverty policies in Scotland

## Summary

The Poverty Alliance in Scotland is conducting a four year project across Scotland entitled EPIC – Evidence, Participation and Change. The project is funded by the BIG lottery fund and is designed to bring those experiencing the effects of poverty together to influence anti-poverty policies and strategies in Scotland at both local and national levels.

The EPIC project team are using VOiCE in a series of measures to identify and map key project participants and groups from across Scotland, investigate potential barriers to engagement and plan and record effective action to engage participants from across all backgrounds. Now at the end of year one, the VOiCE tool is being used as a method to review progress and assess direction in community engagement for the next phase of the project.

## About EPIC

EPIC has been designed to ensure that people from a diverse range of backgrounds from across Scotland can make their voices heard by Scottish Government and other national and local agencies with the purpose of developing a sound basis for action to tackle poverty in Scotland supported by anti-poverty policies and initiatives which address real issues and real experiences.

The project aims to involve 320 community organisations from areas with a high concentration of poverty and deprivation in dialogue on what living in poverty and on low income means, what the effects are and what can be done to meet the needs of those living in disadvantage. EPIC also aims to create opportunities for meaningful participation to enhance the ways in which evidence about the impact of anti-poverty strategies is gathered, analysed and disseminated. The project is supporting people experiencing poverty to gather their own evidence of the effects of poverty through participatory approaches to research where local people investigate, analyse and respond to the problems they face.

Why is community engagement a key feature of the EPIC project?

Two main factors influenced the development of the EPIC project; the need for evidence based responses to social problems and the emergence of ‘participation’ and ‘engagement’ as important principles in policy development.

In the initial project design, the Poverty Alliance highlighted that ‘for many people living in poverty there is a sense of disconnectedness from the policy makers and policies that have an impact on their lives. There are few avenues available to help them engage with decision makers and few resources to help them do so’.

EPIC’s core purpose is to support individuals and community groups to influence anti-poverty policy according to their own experiences and to come together with local and national agencies and policy makers to engage in dialogue on the development of the Scottish Government anti-poverty strategy and the policies which underpin it.

## Why did EPIC use VOiCE ?

EPIC was established in February 2009. There are three members of the EPIC project team; a Policy and Parliamentary Officer, a Community Research Officer and an Administrative Assistant. The team had existing knowledge of community engagement practice and principles but identified early in phase one of the project the need for a resource to enable them to record detail and store evidence of their community engagement activity as the project progressed.

The first stage of the project required the EPIC project team to;

- analyse who the key stakeholders in the project would be
- ensure that there would be wide and varied representation from the target areas
- identify any potential barriers to engagement and what actions would be needed to address those barriers
- identify the most appropriate methods for community and stakeholder engagement

## What were the benefits of using VOiCE?

VOiCE provided the project team with a set of critical questions which enabled them to begin conducting their stakeholder analysis in a rigorous and systematic way. The project design had produced a broad analysis of the target areas but by using VOiCE the team was able to use this tool as one method for recording reflections of the EPIC team on key stakeholders.

By following the key process steps in VOiCE the project team were then prompted to analyse the barriers that potential project participants might face, which in turn influenced the selection of the methods of engagement to be used. The software provided one method to capture in recording barriers in terms of engagement and to draw on the knowledge base of the EPiC team. One issue which was identified was the range of differing perceptions of what poverty actually means – would some of the intended project participants identify themselves as living in poverty?

As a result of the identification of barriers, methods of engagement were then assessed for appropriateness for the target groups and the time available in relation to project milestones.

## What key lessons did the EPIC team learn about using VOiCE most effectively?

- >> **Preparation:** The EPIC team sourced VOiCE through a web search and spent time to independently familiarise themselves with all sections of the tool before agreeing to use it as their main recording database. All team members committed equally to using the tool and populate it with data on a regular basis. Although team members are experienced in community engagement work they identified that specialist advice in the most effective use of the VOiCE software would have saved time in the start up phase of the project.
- >> **VOiCE as a learning tool:** Although the initial motivation for using VOiCE was that it supplied a recording facility, the EPIC team began to use the key steps and handy hints information as a reflective learning approach within each piece of engagement they conducted. VOiCE is now used by the EPIC team as a learning, action and reflection tool for community engagement processes.
- >> **Sorting information:** The EPIC team originally recorded the whole project as one VOiCE record. As the project developed it became apparent that each element of the project was different in terms of characteristics, scale and pace and therefore using one record for all engagements became a complex task. The EPIC team concluded that, in order to use VOiCE to best effect, each discrete strand of the project should have its own record on the database under the umbrella of the EPIC project.
- >> **Shared access:** Once it was established that all team members would use the VOiCE tool. VOiCE was installed on the organisation main server so that access could be shared and all project team members and other Poverty Alliance staff could view and update the same records. This avoided different sets of information being held by different people and was an important approach in avoiding confusion and duplication of effort.

## How will VOiCE be used in the future?

Throughout the first year of the project the EPIC team used VOiCE to log records associated with the engagement element of the project and are now embarking on a review of year one. The review stage of VOiCE will provide the EPIC team with a set of critical questions which will enable them to assess whether any elements of the engagement can be improved in year two.

As a result of the EPIC team using VOiCE, the Poverty Alliance is now using the tool to inform its organisational community engagement strategy as part of Poverty Alliance fieldwork development.

# Creating the Conditions to Support the Use of VOiCE

## Overview

A development site within the Community Planning Partnership in South East Glasgow took a strategic partnership approach to joining up community engagement activities across Community Planning structures. This case study explores how different partners became involved in applying VOiCE.

## Context

Community Planning Support Team staff worked together with a wide range of partner agencies. These included Fire & Rescue, the Police, Culture and Sport Glasgow, local colleges, Land and Environmental Services, the Local Health and Community Care Partnership and the South East Strategic Youth Partnership. Local residents were represented through their participation in two Community Reference Groups. In turn, the Community Reference Groups<sup>1</sup> selected representatives to sit on the South East Community Engagement Co-ordinating Group.

The Community Engagement Co-ordinating Group initiated and lead the work with inputs and links developed with the 2 Community Reference Groups, 5 Thematic Management Groups (Safe, Working, Health, Learning & Vibrant), Area Co-ordinating Group and the 2 local Community Planning Partnership Boards.



<sup>1</sup> Community Reference Groups have been established in each of the ten local community planning partnership areas in Glasgow. Nominated or elected individuals from a wide range of community based organisations are involved. The aim has been to engage a range of community interests across each area by ensuring membership from all the neighbourhoods as well as groups of people from different backgrounds. The CRGs have a role in communicating the priorities of local people to the local Community Planning Partnerships.

## The Plan

Work was designed to focus on partnership activities, not individual agency's own community engagement work. By focusing on the connections and interface between the various structures, partners sought to:

- develop consistency across the South East area
- promote partnership working
- link operational and strategic activities
- provide tangible engagement opportunities for a wide range of people
- define added value from community engagement activity

At the outset, people were not discussing community engagement at a partnership level. There was no evidence that future planning and priority setting was being done on the basis of any sound analysis of community needs. Furthermore, there was no sharing of any intelligence or needs assessments from individual agencies.

There were no explicit links between the Thematic Groups and the Community Engagement Co-ordinating Group (CECG). The partners who came together as the CECG were not necessarily involved at a relevant thematic level.

Initial meetings with the Community Reference Groups had raised concerns about partners duplicating their efforts. Members also felt that they were simply being told things. They were seeking more purposeful consultation and opportunities to enter into meaningful dialogue and partnership with relevant agencies.

The Community Planning Partnership was moving ahead with a programme approach to delivering services under its 5 key themes. Several key stakeholders were concerned that this would progress without community engagement as an underpinning component.

The Community Planning Support Team was keen to act on the issues raised in the *Evaluation of the impact of the National Standards for Community Engagement*<sup>1</sup> which was published in 2008 by the Scottish Government. The local staff specifically wished to address the need to support partners in planning and co-ordinating community engagement. They were keen to explore how best to do this.

From the Team's perspective, there was a need to monitor and co-ordinate community engagement activities, pool resources and create synergy across themes and structures.

## Application

VOiCE was used as the catalyst for driving change and creating consistency across the Partnership. By actively promoting and supporting the use of a standard toolkit, it was hoped that partners would become accustomed to using a common language. Some people had difficulty in conceptualising what good community engagement could look like and partners had different interpretations of what they should be doing.

1. Evaluation of the impact of the National Standards for Community Engagement, The Scottish Government, 2008

A series of information sessions and workshops was programmed with the Community Engagement Co-ordinating Group and each of the Thematic Groups. These were designed to get partners thinking about why they needed to adopt a more strategic approach to planning and evaluating community engagement. Partners also discussed what they would need to do to ensure that their community engagement work had an impact on current and future planning.

Each Thematic Group agreed to:

- include community engagement as a standing item on their agenda
- adopt an agreed template for community engagement planning and reporting
- produce regular reports to the Community Engagement Co-ordinating Group (CECG)
- identify a link officer between them and the CECG

VOiCE was presented as the ideal vehicle for assisting the groups to achieve these changes in their working practices. The key components of VOiCE were introduced at these initial sessions.

As a result of these discussions VOiCE was adopted as a systematic approach for planning and reporting community engagement across the Community Planning Partnership. Partners across all of the various structures committed themselves to using the trigger questions in VOiCE to assist with their planning. The database records would also be used to build up intelligence about community engagement activity across the whole of the South East area.

Follow-up sessions were arranged to identify potential projects which would benefit from the use of VOiCE. These discrete 'projects' were intended to provide practical, tangible examples of VOiCE in practice around a relevant thematic issue. There was a real danger that both VOiCE and community engagement would remain abstract or theoretical concepts the longer partners talked without committing to action.

As a result of the initial discussions, two additional 'projects' were added. These concerned Youth Engagement as a cross cutting theme, and a specific initiative, Queen's Park Performance Project, which was being led by four community councils.

It became clear that people needed to understand why community engagement was important and develop awareness of appropriate levels i.e. informing, consulting and engaging before they could actually use VOiCE effectively.

It was recognised as being important that partners separated the process – addressing the questions VOiCE raises - from recording the answers. In order to use VOiCE, it was acknowledged that very few people would need to access the database to input information. Support could be provided at a later date as part of the ongoing work as people began to implement VOiCE.

Some discussions got bogged down by people worrying about how to access the tool and records. Several concerns were raised by partners about their IT departments not permitting shared access. In order to progress, a decision was made to allocate a dedicated member of the Community Planning Support Team to each 'project.' These officers were already identified with specific Theme Groups and Youth Engagement. It was agreed that they would open up discrete projects on the database and begin recording information. Having one person to input the data and prepare regular reports from the database for everyone else simplified the process and alleviated some of the partners' fears.

A facilitated session on VOiCE and the development site's aspirations was held with the Community Planning Support Team. This enabled the staff to share their concerns and practice inputting information in to the database. It was also beneficial to establish a small group of key people who could sit at the centre of the Development Site with access to all of the 7 discrete VOiCE projects as they progressed.

Sessions / meetings were arranged with appropriate groups of partners to support practical application and the development of the separate 'projects.' These were often facilitated discussions which involved groups of partners agreeing what they were going to do. The Community Planning Support Team keyed appropriate information to the database afterwards.

It was agreed that VOiCE reports and progress updates would be given to the Community Engagement Co-ordinating Group on a monthly basis. The VOiCE reports which were generated from the database would provide a consistent mechanism for monitoring community engagement activity.

Community Reference Group members agreed that as they were not directly involved in the development of the thematic VOiCE projects, they would wait until there was progress to report before becoming actively engaged in the development site. A session was booked which also aimed to develop CRG members' confidence in holding partners to account by clarifying the purposes of their engagement.



## VOiCE Glasgow South East Development Site Initial Time Line

December	January	February	March	April
Information session with CECG	Sessions with 5 Thematic Groups to introduce VOiCE and get agreement to include community engagement as a standing item on their agendas	Thematic VOiCE projects identified	Training session for Community Planning Support Team staff	Sessions with Thematic Groups and stakeholders for the discrete VOiCE projects continue
Agreement to lead Development Site & promote VOiCE	Link officers from each Theme identified to join CECG	Community Planning Support Team staff allocated to maintain VOiCE records	Sessions with Thematic Groups and stakeholders for the discrete VOiCE projects begin	
	Agreement to adopt VOiCE to plan & record community engagement work at each Thematic Group			
	Update to CECG	Update to CECG	Update to CECG	Update to CECG

## Issues and learning

In terms of planning to use VOiCE, the main issues encountered were around agreeing the core purposes of any intended community engagement. Given that partners had never discussed community engagement in these terms, some care was needed.

The openness and transparency which VOiCE offered was double edged. Many partners welcomed the opportunity to record and report on community engagement activities that VOiCE provided. Others felt anxious about their own community engagement practice and became defensive. For the first time, some partners felt accountable for delivering their community engagement activities differently. This clearly felt threatening for some people. Likewise, those who were reluctant to participate fully in discussions about the purposes of their engagement did not relish the prospect of their work being recorded on a database which other partners might have access to.

Understanding community engagement as distinct from direct service provision to communities remained a challenge. What VOiCE did was provide an objective approach with clear definitions which people could respond to. The discipline of methodically answering the questions which VOiCE posed helped people develop understanding and develop stronger partnership approaches.

Good facilitation skills were crucial in terms of working with partners to enable them to use VOiCE. Consensus had to be built within the groups about what they were going to do and why. The best way to apply VOiCE was through facilitation and not to talk about VOiCE as a 'thing' they had to do.

Some partners viewed community engagement as an add-on rather than an underpinning principle of their work. The best way to apply VOiCE principles i.e. starting with a clear purpose, working through a logical reflective process and seeking to achieve higher levels of engagement were crucial in helping people to understand that benefits could be derived by working more effectively with sections of the community.

The absence of an outcome based planning approach to the groups' previous work potentially impeded the effective application of VOiCE. Often this was a double whammy. If people weren't used to agreeing a set of outcomes and they didn't understand community engagement, then getting started took much longer than envisaged.

It was apparent within each of the groups that there needed to be a clear purpose and reason for using VOiCE. Ideally people should already be talking about community engagement in a partnership setting. VOiCE can then be introduced as a tool to help them achieve their outcomes.

Once the 'projects' were up and running, many of the earlier concerns disappeared. When people could see reports and hear of the benefits and impacts from using VOiCE, they relaxed and became more enthusiastic.

The flexibility of VOiCE should be emphasised. It can be used for specific engagements as well as for strategic planning. Some partners were not ready to undertake strategic pieces of work in collaboration with other agencies. However, that should not stop them from using VOiCE in their own work.

The CPP set out to use VOiCE both as a development tool to improve practice and as a management / monitoring tool simultaneously. While this was undoubtedly complex and challenging, VOiCE did prove to be robust enough to meet these potentially conflicting demands.

# Community-led Approaches to Community Engagement

## Overview

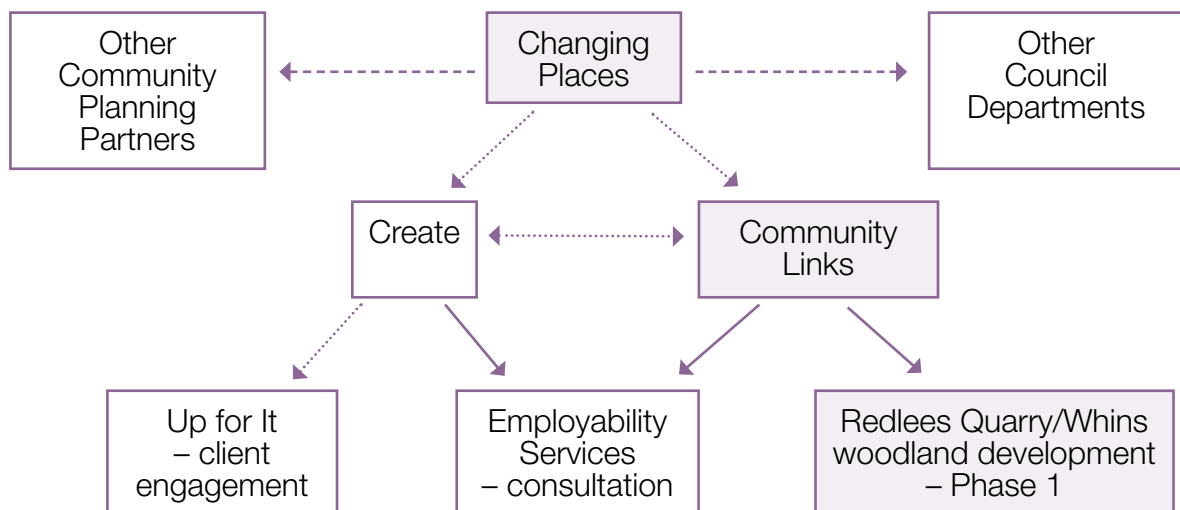
A core purpose of the South Lanarkshire Development Site was , “to build the skills of two local community based organisations, Community Links and Create, to conduct community engagement activity on behalf of a range of key partner agencies in South Lanarkshire”. The key focus for this case study therefore will be to explore how these two organisations, supported by South Lanarkshire Council’s Community Regeneration team (Changing Places), have used VOiCE, the impact this has had on their practice, the benefits that have accrued, the issues they have encountered and how it has impacted on their relationship with South Lanarkshire Council and other Community Planning partners.

## Context

VOiCE has been used in South Lanarkshire by a number of different agencies and individuals, however, the core use has been by South Lanarkshire Council’s Community Regeneration team (Changing Places) and the local community infrastructure organisations - Community Links and Create. A number of VOiCE engagements were undertaken by these agencies during the Development Site period and these are described briefly in the separate snapshots papers.

Changing Places staff have supported the use of VOiCE by Community Links and Create as well as promoting and encouraging the use of VOiCE by other council departments and community planning partners. This has included valuable work in ensuring that VOiCE is located on the central IT server of South Lanarkshire Council.

The diagram below shows the main areas of use of VOiCE during the Development Site period. This case study will focus on one particular example (highlighted in yellow and blue in the diagram) of how Community Links have used VOiCE in undertaking community engagement around the development of Redlees Quarry/Whins Woodlands in Blantyre.



**Key:**

Direct engagement using VOiCE

Support and training for engagement activity using VOiCE

Support, promotion & training in use of VOiCE



## About Community Links and Changing Places

Community Links has been in existence since 1999 as a local voluntary organisation providing a leading role in community engagement and supporting community involvement in a wide variety of local regeneration issues and initiatives. In so doing, they have established a solid relationship with South Lanarkshire Council particularly through Changing Places. This has led to the establishment of a service level agreement with South Lanarkshire Council's Regeneration Services for Community Links to undertake consultation and engagement activities on behalf of the Council. The role of Changing Places has been crucial within this, not only in relation to the direct support given to Community Links but also in relation to ensuring buy-in and commitment to community engagement from other Council Departments and other Community Planning partners.

In relation to the specific Redlees/Whins engagement, the commissioning of the work by South Lanarkshire Council did not come directly from Changing Places but undoubtedly benefited from the profiling by Changing Places of community engagement in general and the specific role that could be played by community infrastructure organisations.

### Redlees Quarry/Whins Woodlands - Phase 1

This engagement relates to the first phase of the planned development of a disused quarry and area of woodland on the outskirts of Blantyre. The site had been identified by South Lanarkshire Council as derelict land which could potentially be developed for use by the wider community, for which they have received finance from the Scottish Government's Vacant and Derelict Land Fund.

The main aim of the VOiCE engagement was to consult with the wider community and ensure that any development of the Redlees Quarry site is supported and endorsed by the community. Community Links were commissioned by the Enterprise Resources Section of South Lanarkshire Council to undertake the community engagement which took place over an 8 month period in 2009/10.

Community Links had already conducted an earlier consultation about the site. In 2007 (long before they had heard of VOiCE) they were commissioned by South Lanarkshire Countryside and Greenspace to undertake an initial consultation with local communities about how they would like to see the area around Redlees Quarry/Whins Woodlands developed. From this initial consultation a 'friends of' group had been established and funding had been identified to undertake a phased process of development of the area in consultation with the local community, the first phase being the development of a feasibility study on the main options for development.

The quality of Community Links initial work saw them being commissioned again by South Lanarkshire Council to undertake the community engagement aspects of the feasibility study and VOiCE was identified as an ideal tool to frame this community engagement process. A full Analyse, Plan, Do and Review cycle was undertaken which allowed a wide cross-section of the local community to actively feed in their own views, ideas and experiences and to directly influence how the site will develop. This influence is evidenced by the fact that the first actual development will be concentrating on implementing the initial community priorities.

## Using VOiCE

Community Links used VOiCE to bring together key stakeholders at different stages of the process. It was found to be extremely useful at the Analyse and Plan stages to have the full range of stakeholders involved in developing an analysis of the purposes and scope of the engagement as well as in setting outcomes. Also, by bringing together key partners at the Review stage they were able to develop a broad analysis of the community engagement processes involved in this stage of the project as well as how this will be built on and developed in subsequent phases.

Although Community Links staff were experienced in community engagement activity they found VOiCE extremely helpful in giving a more formal structure to the process and a discipline to what they were doing. It was also vital in enabling other partners to understand the principles of community engagement and to see very clearly what the process of community engagement is. One of the architects involved in the project commented that this has been the “best community engagement experience I’ve had as a private practitioner”. Using VOiCE at this stage of what is potentially a very large development project also had unanticipated benefits as it was used to gather community views/responses as part of the pre-planning consultation, something which was of clear benefit to the Council.

The role of Changing Places in relation to supporting the use of VOiCE and direct support for Community Links continues to be crucial. They are heavily involved as one of the key partners in the process and are currently exploring options for further use of VOiCE to support aspects of the next proposed stage of the Redlees/Whins Development. This will also focus on working with Community Links about their continued involvement, whether it is in directly conducting community engagement activity or supporting/training others to do so.

## Review, Analysis and Learning

The benefits of using VOiCE have been identified at a number of sessions involving staff from the participating projects and other stakeholders from the development site. These were as follows:

- It is a well-recognised and endorsed tool and as such lends credibility to the evidence gathered and the process followed. It supports local organisations such as Community Links and Create in developing their own sustainability (through Service Level Agreements, funding bids, etc.)
- It supports consistency of approach to community engagement across all projects. The process is followed uniformly regardless of project status.
- Evaluation and analysis of practice is greatly enhanced both for individual projects and across a range of engagements.
- VOiCE has helped people to develop their outcome-focused planning. Previous work on community engagement has been largely output-focused with Community Links and Create being commissioned to undertake surveys or limited consultations with less focus on the wider engagement processes involved.
- It is seen as being an easy-to-use system which asks the right questions of participants at the right time.

## Overall Outcomes

The Community Links and Create Staff Teams are now using VOiCE as an integral part of their work in terms of their external delivery (i.e. undertaking pieces of engagement on behalf of others such as South Lanarkshire Council, the Health Board, etc.).

In addition to this they are also using VOiCE to inform their own practice – Create have dedicated time at their staff meetings using VOiCE to look at their community engagement activity. This has helped to develop the team's shared understanding of community engagement and recognises all team member's contributions and views.

Using VOiCE has also helped team members to be more confident in working with other partners around community engagement as well as in developing the practice of others involved in community engagement activity (e.g. Strathclyde Police).

Changing Places role has been and continues to be vital in relation to both direct support for Community Links and Create and also in relation to raising the profile of VOiCE and overall community engagement processes across South Lanarkshire Council and other partners.



# Pre-application Consultation for Planning Development Proposals

## Overview

Since August 2009, under the terms of the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006, developers initiating national and major development proposals have been required to conduct community consultation prior to the submission of a formal planning application. Planning authorities must be satisfied that the quality of this pre application consultation meets the requirements of the Act or they must decline to determine the subsequent planning application. In this context City of Edinburgh Council Planning has used VOiCE as a means of recording and evaluating the proposals for, and conduct of, pre-application consultation by developers. This approach to using VOiCE is unusual in that it is applied to what other parties are doing rather than to the work of the agency creating the record.

## The context

In 2009 the Scottish Community Development Centre was commissioned by the Improvement Service to conduct a programme of training focusing on community engagement in planning. The pilot programme for this was conducted with the City of Edinburgh Council. The context was the implementation of the Planning Act (Scotland) 2006 and its associated guidance, particularly Planning Advice Note 81 (Community engagement 'Planning with People') that had stated:

'Scotland's planning system is undergoing its most radical overhaul in 60 years. Scottish Ministers are determined to make the planning system more inclusive and accessible to people, with greater openness and accountability in the decision-making process. This cannot be achieved without reforming how planning involves people - but more importantly how people are involved in planning. It also requires real culture change - from everyone involved in the planning process.'

The cultural challenge to developers seeking planning permission for national or major proposals, related particularly to their legal obligation to conduct pre-application consultation. One of the challenges for planning authorities was how to monitor and assess the quality of that consultation. It was in the context of this challenge that planning staff in the City of Edinburgh Council chose to experiment with the potential use of VOiCE to which they had been introduced during the training programme.

The process within which VOiCE was applied is as follows. Where a pre-application consultation is required the applicant must submit a Proposal of Application Notice (PAN) at least 12 weeks prior to the submission of the planning application. This must detail the consultation that the applicant will undertake, when, how and with whom. The statutory minimum requirement is that an applicant must, firstly, consult every community council whose area is within or adjoins the application site and secondly, include at least one advertised public event where members of the public can comment on the development proposal. Within 21 days of the submission of the PAN the planning authority must confirm whether the proposed consultation is sufficient or whether additional consultation is needed.

To accompany the subsequent planning application, the developer must also submit a Pre-Application Consultation Report detailing the consultation undertaken and how the applicant has responded to comments made, including if, and to what extent, changes to the proposals have resulted. The planning authority must assess whether the consultation carried out and detailed in the report, complies with the statutory requirements and any requirements set out in planning's response to the proposal of application notice. Planning must decline to determine an application only where PAC requirements apply and in their view compliance with these has not been demonstrated. Further to this Planning use VOiCE to measure whether the consultation exercise not only met statutory minimum requirements but also to measure how many applicants undertook additional methods of consultation, how and in what circumstances they felt this was necessary.

## The application of VOiCE

In the context of the process described in the previous section, it is vital that a planning authority has a robust system for assessing pre-application consultation requirements and for determining whether what has been done meets statutory requirements. VOiCE has been used both for tracking and to support evaluation of consultation practice.

It is essential to appreciate that in this case the record is not being kept by the developer who will conduct the engagement (though a developer might well benefit by using VOiCE themselves) but by the planning authority that is assessing performance against set criteria. Given the statutory framework and standard procedure, for many elements of the VOiCE records common statements of purpose have therefore been adopted. For example the reason for engagement is always: 'To ensure that communities are made aware of and have an opportunity to comment on the proposal before a planning application is submitted'. Similarly the level of engagement is expressed as a minimum expectation that is required of developers and focuses specifically on consultation (though this would not restrict a developer from adopting more open forms of engagement with communities).

Outcome statements and indicators and methods are also standardised to reflect the necessary requirement for satisfactory pre- application consultation. Outcomes are set in relation to different stages of the process. Some are applied at the time of the Proposal of Application Notice and used to assess the suitability of what is proposed. For example:

'Outcome 2: The form and delivery of engagement is in a manner, location and at a time suitable for the community.

### Indicators:

- Date and time suitable for majority, e.g. evening or weekend? Agreed in advance of PAN?
- Venue accessible to all, e.g. near site, on bus route etc.
- Good quality materials/information provided by the developer, i.e. plans/ visuals of proposals and alternatives available and clear.
- Alternative method of commenting apparent if cannot attend meeting – advert.
- Type of people attended, e.g. only CC members or wide range, e.g. people from different social backgrounds.
- Type of comments received, e.g. knowledge of planning system.
- Feedback to community engagement technician/planning officer from Community Council/members of public following the event'.

Other outcomes and indicators relate to the application stage and are used to assess whether the intended consultation has been conducted appropriately e.g.

‘Outcome 5: The community feel they had the opportunity to express their views and have an input to the application at pre-application stage’.

Indicators:

- Number and content of comments received at PAC stage – PAC report.
- Number and content of material objections received at application stage.
- Consultation responses from Community Council at application stage.
- Feedback from PAC to community engagement technician/planning officer
- Survey questionnaire’.

The outcome statements also set criteria that can be used by City of Edinburgh Council to assess long term satisfaction of communities after the development, if approved, has been completed.

In terms of methods, those set for developers are the ones that meet minimum requirements for pre-application consultation. They are: to send the PAN to City of Edinburgh Council, relevant community councils and additional persons as relevant; to place an advert in a local newspaper, and to hold a public meeting/event. Other methods are set that are required by planning including: recording the PAN publicly in its weekly list and on its planning portal and contacting community councils/neighbourhood partnerships and seeking their views on the proposed consultation exercise (within 7 -21days).

The ‘Do’ section of VOiCE is used to monitor and record activities relating to the prescribed methods. This includes both the actions that the developer has committed themselves to and the actions that the planners need to take themselves. It enables the planners to identify what actions have been taken, to identify any issues and necessary remedial actions. For example a record may indicate that despite agreement to do so a Neighbourhood Partnership has not been contacted.

Clearly to be able to maintain a record in the ‘Do’ section, the relevant officer ( the Community Engagement Technician), needs to maintain an active relationship both with the process of consultation set out by the developer and with the community interests who should be involved. This means that in effect the officer is herself engaging with community interests, in particular the community councils and Neighbourhood Partnerships. The officer is also a member of the City of Edinburgh Council Neighbourhood Partnerships’ Community Engagement Implementation Group. Along with colleagues and working with Planning Aid Scotland she has also been involved in training on community engagement in planning for local community groups.

It is these active relationships with the developer's consultation activity and with community networks, and the knowledge acquired through them, that enables the 'Review' section of VOiCE to be completed. It is this section that is used to determine whether the pre-application consultation proposed and actually applied has met minimum requirements. The National Standards for Community Engagement element of the review is used to assess the quality of the proposed consultation set out by the developer in the Proposal of Application Notice. The Outcomes element of the review is used to assess the quality of the implementation of the consultation. This needs to demonstrate that intent to meet the standards has been followed through in practice. If the consultation process is judged to be adequate this aspect of the statutory requirements of applicants is deemed to have been met.

## Benefits of using VOiCE

The planners have identified a range of benefits of using VOiCE as described. In particular capacity to:

- Monitor the conduct of community engagement
- Review and evaluate community engagement being conducted by others
- Support engagement being conducted by others
- Be consistent in the conduct and assessment of community engagement
- Store and retrieve information about community engagement
- Report on community engagement

## Outstanding Issues

Whilst it is clear that the use of VOiCE has been very positive it is also the case that doing so in this particular context has required some adaptation of it. Further improvements could therefore be made, in particular:

- A version that already contains all the pre-determined statements of purpose, outcomes, indicators and methods would be easier to use.
- At the time of writing, only 2 developments have reached the full application stage. So the capacity to draw on the summary records contained in VOiCE to enable analysis of patterns of pre-application consultation has yet to be tested. Currently there is potential to do so in terms of who is being consulted where and when but it is apparent that further development of the summary recording categories would be beneficial. In particular this might include recording the final assessment of each pre-application consultation process,
- Rather than simply using the terms active, continuing or complete, making changes to the terminology to enable records to be searched in relation to the specific stages of development defined in the planning process would be beneficial.
- The scoring system in the 'Review' section needs to clearly identify what score is treated as meeting the minimum requirements. The planning authority has to decide what is good enough though it may still be very helpful, by retaining a rating scale, to be able to identify how good particular consultation procedures have been

Together these issues point to the possibility of a specific version of the tool designed solely for use in relation to the pre-application consultation requirements of planning legislation. For other aspects of planning for example community engagement in development planning the original version of VOICE would remain appropriate.



## Snapshots: using VOiCE to plan effective community engagement

### The Tried and Tested Doesn't Always Work

For several years Strathclyde Fire & Rescue has run a highly successful Integration Through Safety initiative across Glasgow. The model combines English as a Second Language programmes with the recruitment of asylum seekers and refugees as volunteer peer educators. This has proved to be a highly effective means of involving communities in addressing home safety issues.

In Govanhill, several concerns had been raised by other agencies about the safety needs and issues of the Roma Community, particularly with regard to fire/home safety and a high incidence of burns and scalds.

However, it had become apparent that establishing the tried and tested peer education model was not working. Fire and Rescue staff were finding it very difficult to engage with the Roma community. Having acknowledged that there was a problem, it was suggested that VOiCE might help to provide a means of moving forward.

The discipline of answering the questions VOiCE posed soon began to unblock the impasse. For example, What do we need to know? Illustrated the need to determine which agencies were working with the Roma Community and what the perceptions of safety were within the Roma Community. Several agencies were identified who had an interest in the focus of the engagement. An initial Stakeholders' event was held to inform other people working in the area of the proposed engagement, secure buy-in from them as potential partners and to seek ideas for action.

Partners offered resources to assist and they shared their contacts and experiences.

As a result of the discussions about effective means of engaging with the Roma Community, a new project plan was created. Fire and Rescue altered their approach to achieving the desired outcomes. Instead of attempting to recruit a group of peer educators, they agreed to change their model to work directly with young people from the Roma Community. Evidence had demonstrated that there were several ways of reaching young people as 'organised' communities. Some young people were already accessing other services, whereas older people weren't.

A group of young people has since been identified to work with Fire and Rescue as part of their ongoing Fire Reach programme. These young people will also receive information and materials about home safety which they can take directly back in to their homes.

## Planning Effective Community Engagement Becomes Synonymous With Good Project Planning

The Queen's Park Performance Project in Glasgow is a national pilot project supported by the Scottish Government's Empowering Communities Action Plan with objectives to test community council capacity to lead and shape projects, to work together and with partners and to realise a project of community value.

A partnership steering group comprising representatives from 4 community councils - Crosshill and Govanhill, Langside, Battlefield and Camphill, Mount Florida & Shawlands and Strathbungo – is seeking to restore a former bandstand in Queen's Park. Their ambition is to create a community-based amphitheatre with local participation on its management board and in its programming.

VOiCE was used to help the group develop a Community Engagement Plan. By considering appropriate levels of engagement it became clear that the project needed to engage at all three levels:

- ▶ Inform raise awareness about the project.
- ▶ Consult explore potential useage and performance requirements.
- ▶ Engage identify potential partners, programme deliverers and members of a Management Group.

Given the nature of the project, distinction needed to be made between engaging individuals and engaging groups or organisations. Different roles for the community were also clarified. A set of Community Engagement Outcomes was created:

- A network of supporters is established.
- Officers and elected representatives are informed.
- Potential performers and users of the space are identified.
- A cross section of the community has been engaged.
- People are recruited on to a 'Management Group'.
- A constituted group / body which can apply for funding is established.

These outcomes greatly facilitated the development of a programme of Community Engagement activities. In turn, these activities have helped bring the project to life within the communities surrounding Queen's Park. So far when the group has had to spend some of its grant, it has done so exclusively on community engagement activity: preparing and analysing 717 questionnaires, hiring venues for events and producing compact disks and other materials for dissemination. Plans are underway to hold a design charrette which will offer opportunities for even greater depths of engagement and partnership working.

A key learning point for the Steering Group has been that independent support is critical if voluntary lead groups are developing projects which require wider community support. Sufficient resources are then required to realise meaningful engagement with interested parties.

## Avoiding Consultation Fatigue

YouthBank is an innovative UK-wide grant making initiative. Local YouthBanks provide small grants to projects led by young people which benefit the community and also the young people involved. YouthBank is unique in that it is young people themselves who make decisions about how local YouthBanks are managed and run.

A YouthBank in South East Glasgow is being led by young people and is supported by staff from the Community Health & Care Partnership. It provides an opportunity to create a consistent approach to youth engagement in the South East. The YouthBank will create a two way process - benefits for young people in terms of personal development and empowerment and consultation and engagement opportunities for agencies.

VOiCE was used as a catalyst to begin:

- integrating a co-ordinated approach to youth engagement with the establishment of a YouthBank
- co-ordinating the gathering of young people's views to match partners' needs

Previous work with young people indicated that many of them were sick of being consulted and asked their views if nothing was then going to happen. The local Strategic Youth Partnership had concentrated on discussing service provision for young people without directly addressing how young people might inform and engage in the delivery of such services.

Joint YouthBank / VOiCE planning sessions with youth practitioners demonstrated that greater clarity and understanding were required about appropriate levels of engagement. Similarly, while there was evidence of young people influencing some local project work, nothing had been done to extrapolate this up to a South East level.

By asking "What do we already know?" VOiCE has provided the opportunity to collate information from previous consultations and needs assessments and hold them in one place for the whole of the South East area.

A Youth Engagement Working Group has been established which will focus on co-ordinating youth consultation and encourage greater engagement in local decision making. The group has developed a set of outcomes for youth engagement which will inform future spending plans and Fairer Scotland Fund allocation. All of this work will be fed in to the groups of young people who are leading the YouthBank development.

## Engaging Communities in the Vibrant Glasgow Theme

A Vibrant Glasgow has been identified in Glasgow's Community Plan as a key theme for transforming the city into a place where people choose to live, work or visit. Culture & Sport Glasgow (CSG) was tasked by Glasgow Community Planning Partnership to lead the development of a Vibrant Glasgow. At a local level, this meant establishing what the priorities were in the South East, establishing an effective structure and ensuring that the local community, partners and service deliverers were included in the process.

VOiCE was used to assist with the whole process of creating a Vibrant Plan and establishing structures across the South East area. All four stages of the VOiCE cycle were followed.

Over an 8 month period more than 200 individuals were involved in consultation events and workshops. Staff and volunteers from 22 partner organisations contributed their ideas, skills and resources to the development of the Vibrant Plan. Many of these people have maintained their engagement through membership of the Vibrant Thematic Management Group and attendance at various events organised by the 7 Topic focused sub groups which were formed.

### Issues and learning

- A dedicated officer and independent support were provided for the group to develop the Vibrant Plan and plan community engagement
- An outcome based planning approach used to develop the plan – therefore also consistent with VOiCE requirements
- People were guided through a series of specific questions and tasks which helped to ensure that the consultations remained focused across a variety of topics
- The Vibrant Plan was redrafted several times based on the ongoing consultations and development work
- Local people and organisations had opportunities to engage at different and appropriate levels: at events and workshops, through the Vibrant Thematic Management Group and the various emerging sub-structures
- Informal and interactive methods were used to engage people – ranging from drama, drawing and model making to market place stalls and the nominal group technique

### Impact

Within the South East of Glasgow, the experiences of using VOiCE within the Vibrant theme have proved very beneficial. The database has proved an invaluable resource in pulling together all the component parts of the process and acted as an effective information management system. All partners are able to see the progress made and follow how various consultations influenced subsequent action.

Clear community engagement outcomes and the planned delivery of a programme of different activities has demonstrated that effective Community Engagement can be designed, shared and monitored.

Partner agencies, local organisations and individual members of the community have all reported that they felt a sense of ownership for the Vibrant Plan and that they had truly influenced its content and implementation. As a result, levels of motivation and commitment have remained consistently high a year later.

## Having Your Say on Policing

The focus of the engagement was for Strathclyde Police (Better Blantyre) to develop their engagement practices and generate responses from local residents which would contribute towards the Local Police Priorities and any plans for appropriate local divisions. The local division had already started on the consultation but were unable to commit the time to undertaking the full process and so Community Links (the local community infrastructure support organisation) were commissioned to ascertain the views and opinions of local people with regards to their neighbourhood, local police and local policing priorities.

Community Links used VOiCE to plan and carry out this process. After doing this they then presented an analysis of findings to Strathclyde Police (Better Blantyre) which has led to them being requested to develop a wider analysis for the whole of the local division (Blantyre, Uddingston and Bothwell).

A further development from this is that the local Police have requested training in the use of VOiCE in order that they can develop their own community engagement practice.

## Young People Influence Design of Facilities

This piece of work was undertaken by Changing Places (South Lanarkshire Council's Regeneration Team) and was designed to engage young people in the development of the youth space within Fernhill Integrated Community Facility in Cambuslang. The aims of the engagement were for young people to influence the physical design of the youth space as well as the services delivered there. A range of interactive events and sessions were held which allowed young people to be fully involved in contributing to the design of the youth space as well as the services that will be delivered there. Physical plans for the building have been developed as a result of these sessions and there has been extensive feedback to young people and the local community.

Changing Places staff used the trigger questions from VOiCE throughout and found it particularly useful to help them agree shared aims and negotiate parameters for the engagement with the main partners/ stakeholders. Using VOiCE helped to lend discipline to the process and helped the partners set realistic timescales.

An interesting development was that, although the primary focus was the use of the Community Facility, the engagement led naturally to wider discussions with young people about their feelings about the area and what the key issues were for them growing up in Fernhill.

## Up for It? – Client Engagement in Health Improvement

This piece of work was designed to assist the Up for It? Health Improvement programme in South Lanarkshire to widen their client engagement and gain feedback from service users on the services provided by Up for It? (particularly their health checks). The preferred level chosen for the engagement was 'consult', although it was intended that the information gathered would be used to influence service design. Despite changes in the core staffing mid-way through the process a full VOiCE cycle was undertaken which has led to improved levels of knowledge about best methods of engaging service users and identification of barriers to service users being involved.

A major issue for this piece of engagement was the lack of continuity in terms of staff involved but an unanticipated benefit of this was that the new workers were able to bring a fresh approach and fresh thinking to the use of VOiCE in this context. Another really positive development is that the learning from this process will now directly influence how Up for It? engages with its service users and it has definitely led to fresh thinking about service user involvement and positive changes to practice linked to this.

## Users Views of Employability Services

This piece of work was undertaken jointly by Create and Community Links along with Employability Services of South Lanarkshire Council. The purpose of the engagement was to consult service users about the services they receive and to feed this into a service redesign process. Create and Community Links designed the engagement methods and undertook direct engagement with service users over a 6 month period. Both Create and Community Links used VOiCE to frame the consultation and met frequently to update the database. On completion of the consultation a joint review of the process and outcomes was undertaken by Create and Community Links and this produced the following learning points:

- There were quite significant differences in the experience of Create and Community Links in carrying out the consultation – both were working in different areas and had differing levels of co-operation and response from the other agencies involved. There were also fairly significant differences in the responses from participants.
- The joint working between Create and Community Links was highly beneficial for both organisations.
- The involvement of volunteers and the development in their confidence and skills was a very positive unanticipated outcome.
- Although the consultation evaluated positively and was deemed to be robust, the VOiCE review session helped both Create and Community Links identify some areas which could be strengthened – particularly working with other voluntary organisations.

Although longer-term impact is impossible to gauge at present, one direct action has arisen namely the employment of a Customer Service Officer in one of the local Job Centres. This has come about as a direct result of the VOiCE consultation.

## Community-Led Action Research

Balmedie is a coastal village in Aberdeenshire, around 13 miles from Aberdeen. A local community planning sub-group had identified Balmedie as an area in which they would like to see more community engagement. The sub group wanted to engage with people to identify local needs and were in a position to allocate funding towards these outcomes as result of planning gain monies which were available in Balmedie (Balmedie is in the centre of the proposed TRUMP Golf and Housing Development).

The local CLD service had secured some funding to carry out a community led action research project and three local people were recruited and trained as action researchers to carry this out. The action research team decided to use VOiCE as a tool to help them plan and record the engagement process. VOiCE was initially used by the team of action researchers and two local Community Learning and Development staff in a session facilitated by the CLD Strategy Officer to plan the engagement. At the end of the process the same group and a member of the Community Planning Partnership used VOiCE to self-evaluate the process.

The key lessons from using VOiCE were that

- VOiCE helped in the initial planning stages.
- The process helped co-ordinate the delivery stage.
- VOiCE proved that it is a useful tool to review and self-evaluate at the end of the process.
- Using VOiCE helped to record and capture both intended and unintended outcomes.
- VOiCE helped the team to evaluate and reflect and produced a useful snapshot report at the end of the process to inform the next stage.

## Placechecks

Environment Service in Perth and Kinross Council have been using VOiCE to record the engagement process currently being undertaken as part of Placecheck. Placecheck is a method of assessing the qualities of a place, showing what improvements are needed, and focusing people on working together to achieve them. Most recently the Council have been inviting communities to express an interest in being part of the Placecheck programme. Placecheck can cover a street (or part of one), a neighbourhood, a town centre, or a whole district or city. The setting might be urban, suburban or a village. The Council are using Placecheck to improve greenspace areas/public spaces etc in a number of communities.

The Council have been using VOiCE within the Placecheck Design Team which is made up of various disciplines including Road Engineers, Community Capacity Workers and Development Planners. Users have reported that the tool is encouraging and supporting cross departmental working within the Council by recording and supporting the development of shared outcomes, appropriate methods and assigning key tasks to staff and community members. The Team report that the structured questions within the tool are ensuring that everyone within the multi-disciplined team are speaking the same language in terms of engagement and working to a shared plan.



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